

William Wallace Cook:

Dime Novelist

By

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William Wallace Cook was one of the prolific writers in the "stable" of the world's largest publishing house of dime novels and story papers, Street and Smith of New York City, at the turn of the century. Collectors of dime novels and story papers now seek the stories of this Marshall, Michigan, author. Wally, as he was known to his family and friends in Marshall, had little difficulty in turning out short stories, serials, and novelettes to the order of his main employer, Street and Smith.¹ A variety of pseudonyms has made it difficult to identify completely his vast output of adventure stories for boys, girls, and adults. His versatility was evident on reviewing his known work, for he was adept at writing adventure, love, mystery, detective as well as western stories. He is best known as one of the major contributors of the Diamond Dick, Rough Rider, Merriwell, and Buffalo Bill stories, as well as the Nick Carter stories. Much of his vast output remains unidentified in the numerous pulp story papers of Street and Smith, Munsey and other publishers.

William Wallace Cook was born in Marshall, Michigan, April 11, 1867, and was the only child of Charles Ruggles and Jane Elizabeth (Bull) Cook. According to Cook in his autobiography, *The Fiction Factory*, as a young lad he was encouraged in his writing by his mother, who in a limited way was also a writer, having written for *Harper's Magazine*. His father, however, thought his son was wasting time at scribbling, preferring that he follow a business career.²

The elder Cook came to Marshall in 1845 at the age of six years, grew up in the community, enlisted in the army, serving

¹"Uncle Billy" was the affectionate name given Cook by younger writers who sought his advice on how to construct a plot or market their writings. Letters from T. T. Flynn, undated, [ca. August, 1928]; Erle Stanley Gardner, August 12, 1929.

²John Milton Edwards, *nom de plume* of William Wallace Cook, *The Fiction Factory, Being the Experiences of a Writer Who, For Twenty-Two Years, Has Kept A Story-Mill Grinding Successfully*, (Ridgewood, N. J.: The Editor Company, 1912), p. 21. Information about Cook's life and writing prior to 1912 was taken from this autobiographical account.

three and a half years as a government detective. His employment as an immigration agent for various railroads following the Civil War demanded frequent travel and the family lived for a time in Lafayette, Indiana, and Cleveland, Ohio.³ In 1870 the Cook family went to Ottawa, Kansas, and remained there for eleven years. Here young Cook wrote plays at the age of twelve, in which he performed with his friends. At fifteen he had won an award of merit from Frank Leslie's *Boys and Girls Weekly* for a composition he had submitted.⁴ These early incidents did much to spur young Cook to seek writing as a career.

In 1882 the Cook family moved to Chicago. Upon the urging of his father, William Wallace enrolled in the Bryant and Stratton Business College for two years, but continued to write in his spare time. After leaving school, he worked first as a stenographer for a firm of subscription book publishers, next as a ticket agent for a railroad company, then as a bill clerk for a boot and shoe firm. He returned to work for the railroad company and upon the closing of their Chicago office, Cook worked first in the office for a firm of coke and sewer pipe wholesalers, then as a reporter for the *Chicago Morning News*, finally as a paymaster for a Chicago contractor.

The death of his father in 1889 brought heavy family responsibilities and in an effort to earn extra income, Cook wrote in the evenings and submitted material to newspapers and story papers. The Chicago *Inter-Ocean* story paper accepted an article at space rates (\$2.50), while the Chicago *Times* used one of his stories, without payment. Yet having his material in print gave Cook pleasure and encouragement. The Detroit *Free Press* published Cook's first story, a tale of the Kansas wheatfields, entitled "No 1 Hard," in the fall of 1889. While he received only \$8 for it, he was encouraged to enter the *Free Press* story contest. Two of his short sketches that he entered were bought and published, although he did not win a prize.⁵ That settled it; he became more industrious than ever, determined to find a way to devote more time to his writing. By persistence he found outlets for his short sketches and serial stories during the next two years in *Puck*, *Truth*, *The Ladies World*, *Yankee Blade*, *Leslie's Monthly*, *Chatter*, and *Figaro*. In 1890 a serial published in the Philadelphia, *Saturday Night*, James Elverson, publisher, gave the young writer

³Railroad pass cards of Charles Ruggles Cook in a private collection are for the Grand Trunk Line Northern Pacific; Chicago and Western Michigan; Toledo, Peoria and Western; Rock Island and Peoria; Chicago Burlington and Northern; Chicago and Grand Trunk; and Albert Lea Route.

⁴Edwards (Cook), p. 17.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 21; Marshall *Evening Chronicle*, July 20, 1933, obituary of William Wallace Cook. Marshall Public Library.



—University of Nebraska Photo Service

William Wallace Cook about 1925

confidence that he could be a commercial success as an author, and also pointed Cook toward sensational story papers.⁶ Cook sought more outlets of this type for his work.

He married Anna Gertrude Slater, of Madison, Wisconsin, in 1891. Two years later William Wallace Cook decided, with the encouragement and approval of his wife, to make his living as a writer. Cook had sold many stories and sketches, since his first story for the *Detroit Free Press*, but it was not until 1893 that his earnings from writing exceeded his office salary. His paymaster salary was \$25 a week (\$1200 a year) and his earnings from writing in 1893 amounted to \$1825 with \$1675 of this from one

⁶Edwards, p 23.

firm, Street and Smith of New York City.⁷ While these figures appear bleak today, a family then could live well on \$800 a year and with an income of \$1500 could play the part of "a member of society."⁸

In the spring of 1893, William Wallace Cook through a coincidence was given the opportunity to write for Street and Smith. It came about in this manner. Alfred B. Tozer, editor of *The Chicago Ledger*, had unwittingly suggested such an opportunity when Cook called upon the editor to inquire if that Chicago story paper could use serial stories of his.⁹ Tozer had at that moment received a letter from Street and Smith, along with a bundle of newspaper clippings, requesting Tozer to use the news items as a basis for stories. Cook decided to send a sample of his writing to this well-known publishing firm. After the return of several manuscripts for revisions, Cook was accepted to write novelettes for their juvenile five- and ten-cent libraries. Cook was elated since Street and Smith was regarded as the "big time", as well as a steady market.

Street and Smith had been publishing a fiction weekly, *The New York Weekly*, since the 1850s. In 1889 the firm entered the dime novel field, competing with such well established publishers as Beadle and Adam, the Munros (George and brother Norman), and Frank Tousey. By 1900 the Beadle and Munro outfits had folded, leaving only Tousey and Street and Smith in command of the dime novel field. Street and Smith bought out Tousey and turned the paper-covered novels into serials for pulp magazines. These serials in turn were later re-issued as paper-covered novelettes (Libraries) to a new generation of readers. As soon as a weekly or a library began to lose money, Street and Smith created another publication to take its place, although it too might have a short life, dictated by the changing tastes of the reading public. This practice did not provide security for their fleet of writers.¹⁰

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸Frederick Lewis Allen, *The Big Change*, (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 45.

⁹Edwards, pp. 31-37. Tozer was one of the new writers Frederick Mar-
maduke Van Rensselaer Dey broke in for the Nick Carter stories when the
burden of work became too heavy for Dey.

¹⁰At the time William Wallace Cook became one of the many writers
for Street and Smith, Ormond and George Smith, sons of one of the found-
ers, Francis S. Smith, were the owners of the publishing house. Francis
Scott Street and Francis Shubael Smith took over *The New York Weekly*
Dispatch in 1855, under the paternal guidance of the owner, Amos J. Wil-
liamson. Two years later, having proved their ability, they became sole
owners and changed the name to *The New York Weekly*. At Street's death
in 1883 Ormond Smith bought Street's interest from the estate. Francis S.
Smith, with his sons' assistance, directed the firm until 1933. A detailed
history of the Street and Smith firm can be found in Quentin Reynolds'

Quentin Reynolds attributed the long survival of Street and Smith in the pulp field to two basic principles—diversity and killing off publications as soon as their popularity waned.

The Street and Smith vast publishing enterprise included the *Buffalo Bill Stories*, *The Log Cabin Library*, *The Nick Carter Detective Library*, The Frank Merriwell stories, Jesse James stories, *The Tip-Top Weekly*, the *New Fiction Library*, *The Diamond Dick Library*, the *Rough Riders* (Ted Strong) stories and many others. Russel Nye contends that the last genuine dime novel publication was Street and Smith's *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* in 1912.¹¹ However, the *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* would best be called a serial story paper, for not until the 1920s were these serials compiled into a paper back book form. Even these reprinted serials were extensively edited or revised, a necessity to make the three (or more) parts blend together, and to remove the "cliff-hanging" devices required for a serial.¹²

To provide stories for their many pulp publications Street and Smith kept a stable of writers busy turning out adventure stories on order. Stock writer names that were the property of Street and Smith were used. Many a young writer grew to literary maturity during his tenure with Street and Smith. The following are a few of the better known authors who wrote for Street and Smith at various times:

John Russel Coryell, originator of "Nick Carter" name.

Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey, primary author of the Nick Carter detective stories.

Edward Zane Carroll Judson, "Ned Buntline," No. 1, author of Buffalo Bill stories.

Prentiss Ingraham, "Ned Buntline," No. 2, author of Buffalo Bill stories.

Horatio Alger, Jr.

Upton Sinclair

Edward B. Ellis

St. George Rathborne, author of Buffalo Bill stories.

William Gilbert Patten, "Burt L. Standish," creator of the Frank Merriwell stories.

W. Bert Foster, author of Buffalo Bill stories.

John H. Whitson, author of Buffalo Bill stories and Merriwell stories.

A. Conan Doyle

Bret Harte

Sidney Porter, (O. Henry)

Theodore Dreiser also wrote for this publishing firm and served a

The Fiction Factory or From Pulp Row to Quality Street, (New York: Random House, 1955). The similarity of Reynolds' title to the title of William Wallace Cook's book of 1912 is striking.

¹¹Russel Nye, *The Unembarassed Muse*, (New York: Dial Press, 1970, p. 201.

¹²Frank Luther Mott, *A History of the American Magazine*, Vol. IV, 1885-1905, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 117.

year as editor of *Smith's Magazine* (1905), a Street and Smith publication.

William Wallace Cook, credited as one of the many authors of the Diamond Dick, Frank Merriwell, Nick Carter, Buffalo Bill and Ted Strong of the Rough Rider stories, wrote numerous stories for many Street and Smith publications.

Pulp literature in the form of dime novels and story papers, while fostering patriotism, conventional morality, and virtuous conduct, provided entertainment for the masses through swift action, dramatic tales. Yet these stories, strangely enough, were frowned upon by parents, because they thought the sensational, exciting incidents might have immoral affiliations. These dime novels and story papers make tame reading for today's youngster satiated with television's blood and crime of the 1970s. In retrospect they served an educational function for they provided the means and created the desire for reading that has been largely lost for today's television oriented youth.¹³

Pulp literature is criticized for its stilted, crude writing, yet some ten million Americans paid tribute to the dime novel and story papers each month. The pulps never suggested any possible satisfaction in ideas, in intellectual curiosity, or in esthetic pleasures, for their role was one of escape from a humdrum troubled life to one of romance and excitement.¹⁴

While Erastius F. Beadle, and his brother Erwin, are credited as the originators of the dime novel in 1860, an editorial in *Western Library Messenger* points out that cheap literature was viewed with disfavor as early as the 1840s.

Riding on the cars through Michigan today, we have been half amused and half pained to see with what avidity "yellow covered literature" is here as elsewhere, devoured by travelers . . . men, with foreheads of respectable dimensions, have busied themselves for hours today . . . in perusing, page by page, the contacts of some shilling romance by [J. H.] Ingraham or some other equally stale and insipid novelist.¹⁵

The major pulp publishing firm, Street and Smith, found prosperity at the end of the century, and on into the 1920s and '30s by providing "the John Smith's of America" with a variety of inexpensive reading matter that chronicled the adventures of Nick Carter, Diamond Dick, Buffalo Bill, Ned Strong, and Frank Merriwell. The pulps at the turn of the century concentrated on virtuous characters and exciting adventures, but by the 1920s three

¹³Frank Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America*, (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1958), p. 51; Nye, p. 203.

¹⁴Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), pp. 725, 726, 729.

¹⁵An editorial in the *Western Literary Messenger*, VIII, No. 16, May, 22, as quoted in Albert Johannesen, *The House of Beadle and Adam*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 3.

other broad categories began to emerge: love, detective and western. By the 1930s other pulp publishers were imitating Street and Smith's three most successful magazines, *Love Story*, *Detective Story* and *Western Story*. Early love stories titillated readers without being pornographic. Pulp dealing with raw sex emerged in the late 1920s when publishers took advantage of the new frankness that followed the war. The detective story remained as a clear cut category, but a distinction between a western and an adventure story came about. Adventure stories eventually were subcategorized into sea, sport, air, and spy themes. The science fiction pulp emerged as a separate category in the late 1920s, but its antecedents can be found in such early story papers as *Argosy* and others that ran tales based on supernatural phenomena, or with scientific or pseudo-scientific background. Street and Smith's *Western Story* created in 1927 was the last of their dime paperback novelettes. The firm rightly read the public pulse in the thirties and forties and turned to science fiction, comics, romance and women's fashion magazines.¹⁶

The fiction of William Wallace Cook by his own statement was one of clean ethics. In a newspaper interview he contended he never wrote a line in his stories but what he would permit his own son to read, feeling secure that the reading would do no harm, but would, on the other hand, be beneficial to the boy.¹⁷ Cook's stories had a great variety of content, in which adventure, mystery and daring situations predominated. One of his novelettes, *A Quarter to Four, or The Secret of Fortune Island*, in the *New Fiction Library* (1908) serves to illustrate. Robert Lorry, the hero, inherits the estate of an uncle in which the sole property is an envelope, a "small packet of paper money" and instructions in regard to the meeting of three other individuals at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, who would identify themselves with the phrase "A Quarter to Four". They were to have similar envelopes, then all were to go to the office of a San Francisco lawyer for further instruction. Another envelope conveyed directions to charter a boat and prepare for a long cruise. Additional envelopes were to be opened at specified times once the four were at sea. Adventure, mystery and daring situations were imaginatively devised, with the personality of the individuals playing a major role. Besides the hero, there was a complaining, older woman; a beautiful, virtuous young woman; and a treacherous, crafty young man. Each chapter was packed with excitement ending with a "cliff hanging" situation. All the while, the reader knows a treasure

¹⁶Theodore Peterson, *Magazines of the Twentieth Century*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964, p. 201.

¹⁷Marshall *Evening Chronicle*, July 20, 1933.

will be found and the hero will wed Zelda, the beautiful, virtuous young woman. In an "O. Henry" ending, Lorry finds that his uncle is not dead but a very ill man and had used this adventurous means to get his part of an ill-gotten treasure to San Francisco and to convey the shares of his three dead comrades to their heirs without the heirs knowing of its tarnished source.

One of William Wallace's first tasks for his new employer was to construct a tale based on a prominent insurance case reported in the newspapers. The use of news items as a foundation for a plot was an accepted practice of pulp publishers at the turn of the century. Cook decided to build his own inspirational source material by clipping interesting news stories upon which he might build a fictional tale, these he categorized and filed in letter-files. The indexing was done in such a way to suggest the character or main theme of the news item and where the clipping could be found in the letter-files. This system was no doubt a partial inspiration for his last book, *Plotto*.

Cook also maintained an extensive personal library that aided him to obtain realism in his fictional tales. Jules Verne's book *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) was one of the classics found in Cook's library and served as the inspirational basis for one of Cook's novelettes *Around the World in Eighty Hours* (1925). Borrowing from a masterpiece was a form of admiration and little effort was made to disguise this fact.¹⁸

William Wallace Cook experienced early the insecurity of writing for a publishing firm that rapidly adapted to the ever-changing pulp fiction field. For almost a year he had been writing serials for Street and Smith exclusively when the publishing firm decided to use reprints for a time, leaving Cook without a market. This alerted him to the danger of concentrating on one type of story for a particular outlet. He sent copies to Street and Smith of two of his published stories which had appeared in *Saturday Night* to inquire if similar stories would be considered for their most popular story paper, *The New York Weekly*. Ormond Smith liked them well enough to give Cook the assignment of writing sentimental fiction for young women under the pseudonym of "Julia Edwards," a Street and Smith owned name. Many of the Julia Edwards stories were actually written by men, such as Cook, Edward Stratemeyer, and others. "Julia Edwards" according to her inventors was a poor orphan working girl who wrote stories of her bleak life. As the bicycle was the current fashion, Cook was to build a love story that exploited this current infatuation. "Bicycle Bell" was the title of Cook's first serial under the Julia

¹⁸William Wallace Cook's library and papers are preserved by a private collector.

Edwards *nom de plume*.¹⁹ While the *New York Weekly* assignment provided a somewhat steady income, Cook thought he needed to seek other markets.

In July 1894, Cook made his first trip to New York City to confer with his publishers, hoping for additional assignments. He was given the task of writing a novelette in serial form. He wrote the first two installments while visiting in Michigan, where he had close relatives. Upon completion of the novelette he received \$500 for it, considered a large sum, as typical rates were 1/2 cent per word. Cook was elated as this was the most he had received for a serial story. He was commissioned to do two other juvenile serials under a Street and Smith *nom de plume* that year. Cook was now confident he had established himself as a productive writer, for his year's work brought him \$2750, more than he could have earned in the business world, but what brought more satisfaction was the confidence that Ormond Smith had placed in his work.²⁰

The next few years brought hard times, and ill health. When his health permitted he continued to turn out "two 30,000 word stories per week," but when his illness curtailed his output, Street and Smith gave others his previous assignments. Such were the realities of the pulp publishing field. Shortly after the beginning of the year (1895), Street and Smith notified him that the nickel library business was not flourishing and that he would receive \$40 per novel, rather than the \$50 he had been paid. They did, however, suggest he submit a story for a new detective library, *Diamond Dick*.²¹ This character was to bring some fame to Cook, and he took Diamond Dick through many a Western adventure. Cook was one of the numerous writers of the Diamond Dick series writing under the Street and Smith name of W. B. Lawson. The *Dime Novel Roundup* has reprinted one of Cook's Diamond Dick stories, "Diamond Dick Jr's Call Down on the King of the Silver Box." (1895)²²

The Diamond Dick detective serial was conceived by Street and Smith to rival the Deadwood Dick detective library of Beadle and Adam. Nye states that the originator of Diamond Dick was Samuel S. Hall. However, William Wallace Cook was one of the writers of these detective stories as early as 1895. Quentin Reynolds contends that Diamond Dick was inspired by an old frontier

¹⁹Mary Noel, *Villains Galore: The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly*, (New York: MacMillan, 1954, p. 185; Edwards (Cook), pp. 43, 48.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 57.

²²*Dime Novel Round Up*, a magazine of the Dime Novel Club, first issued in 1944, edited by Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

fighter, Richard Tanner, who, tradition states, served on the plains with Custer and then gave exhibitions of his shooting skill in wild west shows. Diamond Dick and his friend, "Handsome Harry," galloped through millions of pages in the Diamond Dick library.²³

Cook now had many assignments entailing deadlines that must be met if he were to make up the loss of \$10 per nickel novel. Although ill he thought he could increase his productivity with the aid of stenographers. Shortly, however, he discovered that his time was consumed with editing and revising so that little profit was gained. Dismissing the three helpers he returned reluctantly to his earlier system, a slower but proven formula.

Cook describes this efficient system in his autobiography. His rapid, neat typing skill, developed during newspaper reporter days, enabled him to compose directly on the typewriter, including a carbon copy as he typed the original. Stories were double spaced on 8½ x 11 inch paper, with four hundred words on one sheet. A serial of 60,000 words covered one hundred fifty sheets; those of 30,000, seventy-five sheets; with short stories averaging from fifteen to twenty pages. Cook believed in having the latest in typewriters, as it saved him time, thereby increasing his production, as well as producing neater copies. He admits to owning twenty-five typewriters, often two machines at the same time, and could change from one machine to another without hampering his flow of ideas.

Stories were sent to a publisher with a self-addressed return envelope. By using paper and envelopes of the same weight, postage or express charges were easily calculated. Records of his manuscripts were at first kept in a bound book of pre-printed stubs and from letters, containing the date sent, the date returned, refusals or payment received. A quick look through this book gave him an idea of his current manuscript inventory. This proven system was to serve him efficiently throughout his writing career. He later made one adjustment using index cards rather than the bound books, to keep track of his manuscripts.²⁴ High production was mandatory for the remuneration was usually at a given rate per word, varying through time from one-half cent, one or two cents, to two and one-half cents and finally to three and three and one-half cents per word; thus a 1000-word short story at one cent a word would be worth \$10. Cook was receiving the top rate of two to two and one-half cents per word by 1910 and three and one-half cents per word in the late 1920s.

In the fall of 1895, the doctors identified his illness as tuberculosis and advised him to move to a southwest location. From

²³Nye, p. 206; Reynolds, pp. 96-98.

²⁴Edwards, pp. 25-30.

November, 1895, to April, 1896, Cook and his wife lived on a ranch near Phoenix, Arizona, with Cook turning out Diamond Dick five-cent libraries for Street and Smith, as well as writing sketches and short stories for other publications. This western experience, while it brought about financial insolvency, provided inspiration not only for the Diamond Dick stories but for later Buffalo Bill and Rough Rider (Ned Strong) stories.

One of Cook's western short sketches, that appeared in *Munsey's Magazine*, May, 1896, entitled "Peter: A Study in Red," brought forth a strange reader reaction. Cook, while in Arizona, was continually alert for story material and spent time exploring the countryside and checking out local news. On one of these excursions he was told about the building of a dam at a place called Walnut Grove. The dam when completed stored a great deal of water. However, one night the dam gave way and a number of laborers, working a gold mine by a hydraulic method below the dam, were drowned. Cook's sketch for Munsey related how a Maricopa Indian, riding his pony in the gulch below Walnut Grove, gave up his mount to a white girl to prevent her drowning in the flood waters of the broken dam. After the sketch was published, Cook received a letter from a young Indian on the Maricopa Indian Reservation, claiming the Maricopa Indian rescuer was his father.²⁵ Fiction had turned into fact for one reader.

While in Arizona, he became interested in the possibility of developing a gold mine, and went east to secure capital to form a company to purchase and develop the mine. Whether he obtained capital from other sources is unknown, but he invested his own reserve in the venture. In a few weeks the mining venture proved a failure, with a loss of \$10,000 to Cook.²⁶

Cook's finances were virtually exhausted and in desperation he and his wife made a "prospecting" trip to New York, hoping that Street and Smith would permit him to submit additional stories to the firm. Since other authors were turning out acceptable stories, the publisher informed Cook that work could not be taken out of their hands and for the present time no new, continuing assignment was possible. They did, however, give him an order for four nickel novelette stories to be held in reserve in case a regular contributor, then ill, failed to meet deadlines, as well as four sketches for their new publication, *Ainslee's Magazine*. However, within a few days the publisher informed Cook that the regular writer was well and anxious to regain his post. Cook was to complete the nickel novelettes he had started. Two were accepted at \$40 each. Four

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

sketches for *Ainslee's Magazine*, were accepted at \$10 each, but this amount would not long pay their New York expenses.²⁷

Cook, with his wife, returned to Chicago, bringing with him an order for a serial for *The New York Weekly*. Renting a flat on the north side, the Cooks took their household effects out of storage and faced the problem of a meager existence, as Cook could now work only a half-day. Writing became a chore and the results were unsatisfactory, yet he persevered. By October, 1897, a serial was accepted by Street and Smith. Cook expected to receive \$300 for it, but was paid \$200. His protest brought an additional check for \$100. The year closed with another order from Street and Smith for a Julia Edwards story. At the end of the year his income totaled a meager \$425 but the following year his fortunes took a slight upturn.²⁸

Cook sold a Julia Edwards serial to *The New York Weekly* shortly after the new year. In the spring, although little improved in health, Cook decided to journey to New York, hoping his presence would secure commissions. His arrival was opportune, for Street and Smith had decided to initiate a library based on the Klondike gold rush. Cook was given the assignment to write stories for the *Klondike Kit Library*, a juvenile serial. Cook gave the hero, Klondike Kit, a beautiful heroine, Nugget Nell, a resourceful, brave companion in Klondike Kit's many adventures. The Cooks remained in New York for three months; while there he wrote Klondike Kit stories and another serial for *The New York Weekly*. Because of the heat at midsummer, they retreated to the Catskill Mountains, living in a hotel near Cairo. By late summer Cook received the discouraging news that since Klondike Kit was not successful as a weekly, it would be continued as a monthly. Up to that time Cook had written sixteen stories for this library.²⁹ Obviously a monthly check of \$40 would not pay for a summer resort life, so Cook and his wife returned to Chicago, settling again on the north side. Although his health was far from good, Cook continued to write for the *Klondike Kit Library*, *The New York Weekly* (Julia Edwards stories) and *The New York Five-Cent Weekly*. The *Five-Cent Weekly* assignment had been given to Cook due to the fact that the regular writer was seriously ill.³⁰

By this time Cook was confined to his bed, but a writing assignment could not be refused since the family finances were at low ebb. A stenographer was hired and Cook dictated his stories for two weeks, then resumed writing them in bed on an improvised table. Much to the wonder of his physician and his wife, Cook

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 61 and 72; Reynolds, p. 273.

²⁸Edwards, pp. 61-62, 72-75.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 81-82; Reynolds, p. 107.

³⁰Edwards, pp. 82-84.

slowly improved. He began a story embracing his Arizona experiences. This serial served a year later to introduce Cook to Matthew White, Jr., editor of *The Argosy*, a Munsey publication.³¹ Cook had increased his earnings, most of which came from the Klondike Kit series. In better health the following year Cook turned out thirty-five five-cent libraries for Street and Smith, three *Klondike Kit Libraries*, and a novelette.³²

Up to the turn of the century Street and Smith had been the heaviest purchaser of Cook's fiction. The serial he had sold to *The Argosy* encouraged him to seek other publishers. Shortly he found a market for a serial with *The Western World*, through a gentleman with whom his wife had become acquainted while attending Frank Holmes School of Illustration. *The Western World* purchased another serial, a mystery story, which the editors planned to use to boom circulation; i.e., the solution was not revealed until the last chapter, and prizes were offered for the correct solution of the mystery.³³

In 1900 the McClure syndicate bought one of Cook's serials, issuing it first in metropolitan newspapers, then sold it to the Kellogg Newspaper Union, who in turn issued it as a "patent" to be sent out to country newspapers. Several years later, G. W. Dillingham Company, a New York publisher, bought the story, *His Friend the Enemy*, and published it with a paper cover.³⁴ Cook continued to submit stories to *The New York Weekly* and *The New York Five-Cent Weekly*. He received a further assignment to write twenty-eight stories for *Do and Dare*, a Street and Smith juvenile weekly.³⁵ This weekly for young boys featured "Phil Rushington" as the hero. When Cook had finished fifteen stories, the original writer became sick, and Cook was given the task of completing an unfinished story and then writing the entire series. *Do and Dare* folded after some forty-seven issues.³⁶

The story Cook had written during his illness was purchased by *The Argosy's* editor, Matthew White, Jr., for \$250. On the proceeds of the sale Cook and his wife took an extended outing to Atlantic City, New York, Boston, Salem, Plymouth and other places in the New England states. Cook devoted his mornings to

³¹"He Was a Stranger," cited in Cook's autobiographical account, was later published as *His Friend the Enemy*.

³²Edwards, pp. 85-87, 96-97.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

³⁴William Wallace Cook, *His Friend the Enemy*, (New York: G. W. Dillingham Company, 1903).

³⁵Edwards, pp. 96-99, 102; Reynolds, p. 108.

³⁶Stanley A. Pachon, "William Wallace Cook," *Dime Novel Round-Up*, September 15, 1957, p. 72. This article encompasses only the years prior to 1912, being based on Cook's autobiographical account in *The Fiction Factory*.

writing and his afternoons to sightseeing. Late that summer, the Cooks went west, first to Michigan, then on to Wisconsin. They returned to Michigan, "to the little town where Cook was born, bought an old place and settled down."³⁷ This property on North Kalamazoo Avenue in Marshall, Michigan, was a bracketed brick house in the Italian villa style, built in 1869 by Frederick Karstaedt, a clothing merchant. Cook purchased the property in 1900. Later he removed the original wide front stone steps and added a porch. The property is now owned by Garth Thick.³⁸

During his thirty-three years in Marshall, Cook participated in many city and state affairs and organizations. He was a member of the Presbyterian church, a Knight Templar, the Shrine, and a faithful attendant of the Marshall Rotary Club. He was a first-class story teller at family and social gatherings. His generosity was relied upon by colleagues, friends, and family for assistance in time of need or emergencies. In 1923 he was a member of the City Commission that was appointed to revise the Marshall City Charter. In 1931 he was appointed a member of the Marshall Electric Light and Water Commission, an office which gave him great satisfaction. He was a Democrat although most of his relatives were Republicans. He was an active member of the Michigan Authors Association, The Chicago Press Club and the Battle Creek Writer's Club.³⁹

Once established at Marshall, Cook continued to write for Street and Smith's *New York Five-Cent Weekly*, as well as to revise and lengthen some of his old stories for this publisher. A new boys serial library, *Boys of America*, was created by Street and Smith and Cook wrote many stories for it. Street and Smith again reduced the remuneration for their weeklies and discontinued all orders for their five-cent libraries. Reprints would be issued again since there was a new generation of juvenile readers. Cook met this turn of events by directing his output toward Munsey's publication, *The Argosy*. G. W. Dillingham brought out Cook's book *His Friend the Enemy*, as a hard bound book. A prospecting trip to New York city during the winter of 1904, brought an assignment to write for a new Street and Smith publication, *The Popular Magazine*.⁴⁰ He was told also that there would be a new weekly, *Young Rough Riders*, (later changed to *Rough Riders*), for which he was to create stories, along with St. George Rathborne. The rate was to be \$50 for each, a nice advancement from the old \$40

³⁷Edwards, pp. 98-99.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 99-100; a private collector; Mabel C. Skjelver, *The Nineteenth Century Homes of Marshall, Michigan*, (Marshall: Marshall Historical Society, 1971), p. 148.

³⁹Marshall *Evening Chronicle*, July 20, 1933.

⁴⁰Edwards, pp. 100, 102.

rate.⁴¹ Ted Strong, the fictional hero of the Rough Rider stories, was one of the volunteers with Teddy Roosevelt, having fought in the Spanish American War in the Philippines. Following the war he owned a ranch, Black Mountain, in the Bad Lands of Dakota. William Wallace Cook wrote for this series under the Street and Smith stock name of Edward C. Taylor or as Ned Taylor. Cook took over the writing of the Ted Strong stories from Rathborne with issue No. 38 and continued through issue No. 123, when Cook was temporarily relieved by W. Bert Foster. Cook and Foster shared authorship through issue No. 175. *The Rough Rider Weekly* stories were reprinted in the *New Medal Library* under the byline of Edward C. Taylor from 1909 to 1915. The Ted Strong stories in *New Medal Library* appeared as serials in the *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* from 1916 to 1919. They were re-issued from 1923 to 1930 in a thick pulp book series known as *Western Story Library*.⁴² Street and Smith were not inclined to permit good material to lie idle if it could be fitted into one of their numerous publications.

Buffalo Bill Stories was a Street and Smith weekly for which William Wallace Cook wrote western stories after his move to Marshall. This western weekly was Street and Smith's most long-lived story paper, having a total of 591 issues from 1901 to 1912 (the last nine issues were repeats of the earliest Buffalo Bill tales). It ceased publication for one week and came back as *The New Buffalo Bill Weekly*, running from September 12, 1912, to June 19, 1919. Although hailed as "new", all the stories were re-issues of previous *Buffalo Bill Stories*. There were periods when the reprinting from the originals was fairly well mixed up, with some of Cook's original stories deleted. With issue No. 357 *The New Buffalo Bill Weekly* became *The Western Story Magazine*. This title was also used for reprints of the Rough Rider stories, as previously stated. *The Western Story Magazine* also reprinted from other early Street and Smith publications, such as *Golden Hours*, *Good News*, *Bound to Win Library*, *Boys of Liberty Library* and the new *Medal Library* to the extent that only dedicated collectors would be willing to expend the effort and time to identify the original sources. Cook wrote a great many of the Buffalo Bill tales up to 1919, sharing the task with Prentice Ingraham, St. George Rathborne, W. Bert Foster and John H. Whitson.⁴³

In 1904, Mead and Company brought out Cook's second hard-back book, *Wilby's Dan* under his own name. Like his first book,

⁴¹Reynolds, p. 116.

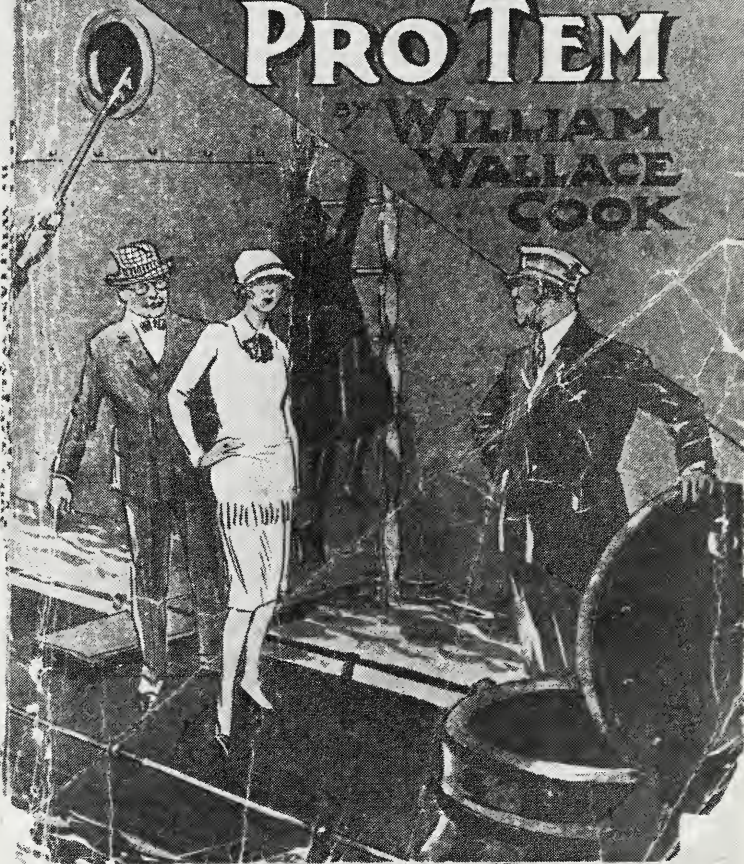
⁴²J. Edward Leithead and Edward T. LeBlanc, "Rough Rider Weekly and the Ted Strong Saga," *Dime Novel Round-Up*, July 15, 1972.

⁴³J. Edward Leithead, "New Buffalo Bill Weekly," *Dime Novel Round-Up*, May 15, 1970.

THE ADVENTURE LIBRARY No. 20

BILLIONAIRE PRO TEM

by WILLIAM
WALLACE
COOK



—University of Nebraska Photo Service

Cover of *Billionaire Pro Tem*, published in 1907

Wilby's Dan did not prove to be a great financial success, earning him only \$250.⁴⁴ While Cook began to use his real name, pen names were still employed. A chance discovery of a Cook short story, "Bridget's Return", under the name of William Wallace Whitelock, which appeared in *Munsey's Magazine* for June, 1904, serves to illustrate the complexity of locating and identifying Cook's writings under various names.

Cook's continued output for Street and Smith did not deter him from writing for his old patron, *The Argosy*, and from seeking new outlets, such as *Woman's Home Companion*, *The Blue Book*, *The Red Book*, *The Railroad Man's Magazine*, *All-Story Magazine*, *The People's Magazine*, *The Popular Magazine* and *The Ocean*.⁴⁵ Through extensive reading he was able to write with realism on subjects removed from his personal experience. His technical knowledge on railroads was limited, despite his father's vocation, as was his knowledge of the sea, yet informed readers wrote favorably of his realistic familiarity with these subjects. In this his personal library and categorized reference material proved a great aid.

His production for 1908 was the largest so far in his career. His output in 1908 consisted of forty-four nickel novels for Street and Smith, (Buffalo Bill and Rough Rider stories), two novelettes for *The Blue Book*, four serials for Munsey publications, and a novelette for *The People's Magazine*. This averages one story per week. Two of his stories that year were purchased and translated by a German publisher, raising the hope that other European publishers might buy his stories, but this did not develop.⁴⁶

That fall, Street and Smith offered to purchase the book rights of Cook's serials that he had written for Munsey and other publishers. Since Cook had failed to retain the book rights, he decided to go to New York to confer with editors White and Davis, of Munsey, as well as other publishers. Cook successfully obtained the required paper book rights with little difficulty. Of the serial stories only seven were long enough for immediate issue in paper book form. The others required lengthening and revision. These earlier serial stories from *The Argosy*, *All-Story*, *Ocean*, *Scrap-Book*, *Railroad Man's Magazine*, *Popular Magazine*, *People's Magazine*, *Blue Book* and *Woman's Home Companion* became Street and Smith's *New Fiction Series*.

In the fall of 1909 Street and Smith gave Cook "a new line of work", the *Motor Stories*, paying \$75 for each. However, they were discontinued after thirty-two issues, although Cook wrote a total of thirty-four. Street and Smith rarely let stories remain in

⁴⁴Edwards, pp. 115, 122, 124, 126.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 138-141, 176-180.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 147-150.

their files for long, so the extra two were published in *The Brave and Bold* weekly. Cook continued to write Buffalo Bill stories regularly.

A third hardback book, *A Quarter to Four*, was brought out by G. W. Dillingham Company in 1909.⁴⁷ Cook also tried his hand at writing scenarios for a company that had obtained the privilege of taking moving pictures of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and Pawnee Bill's Far East Show. While Cook furnished a great many scenarios, the remuneration was small, only \$25 for all.⁴⁸

From 1910 onwards Cook took on new assignments, although he continued to write for Street and Smith as well as for the Frank A. Munsey publications. Now stories carried his own name. A short story, "A Winged Victory," appeared in the May, 1910, issue of *Munsey's Magazine*. *Harper's Weekly*, August 5, 1911, published "Creshaw of the Gold Mill," a William Wallace Cook short story.

Street and Smith placed a new magazine, *Top-Notch*, in circulation in 1910. William Wallace Cook became a writer for it in 1911. Seward of Sacatone, a much loved desert character, was featured in Cook's countless adventure stories for *Top-Notch*.

That year he began to write his autobiography, using a pseudonym (John Milton Edwards) upon the advice of a friend.⁴⁹ *The Fiction Factory* was published in 1912 and must have sold reasonably well for the book is found in many college and public libraries.

The loss of his wife in 1912 briefly curtailed his output, yet he continued to write for *Top-Notch* magazine at the rate of one story a month from 1911 to 1915. He wrote Merriwell adventure stories under the Street and Smith owned name of Burt L. Standish.⁵⁰

In 1916, Cook wrote several mystery stories for the *Detective* magazine, and continued with the *Top-Notch* assignment. When Gilbert Patten, the creator of the Merriwell stories, became editor of *Top-Notch* magazine in 1916, he ceased to write Merriwell tales. Cook, William Almon Wolff and John H. Whitson became the authors. From 1916 on *Top-Notch* featured new stories by these writers as well as many reprints of Patten's earlier Merriwell stories from *Tip-Top* weekly. The Merriwell stories continued to be so well received that reprints appeared in paper back form in the *New Metal Library* and *The Merriwell Series* during the 1920s.

Munsey publications and Street and Smith continued to be the main outlets of Cook's writings. By 1919 Cook indicated his gross earnings for the year were \$10,707 in correspondence with the

⁴⁷Edwards, pp. 155-156; Pachon, p. 74.

⁴⁸Edwards, p. 166.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁰Archives of Street and Smith, now in the possession of Conde Nast Publications, Inc.

Collector of Internal Revenue. In an attempt to reduce his income tax for that year, Cook wished to have his inventory of publishable stories re-evaluated by the internal revenue. Shortly after the ratification of the sixteenth amendment in 1913 income tax rates ranged from 1% to 7% on incomes in excess of \$3000 for a single individual. Cook's single status made him accountable for a higher rate, although his mother now resided with him and was dependent upon him for support.

Cook requested a "write off" of stories that had "exhausted their value," much as a business man writes off merchandise at a loss when it is no longer salable. He listed the stories in his inventory at their original sale price, two cents per word, estimating their current worth at half value, one cent per word, since Cook still held the second American serial rights, foreign serial rights, book rights and "moving picture" rights.⁵¹ Cook's re-evaluated inventory of stories totaled more than \$4000, a comfortable reserve.

The *Top-Notch* assignment continued to bring William Wallace Cook a measure of prosperity. He wrote serial and short stories for *Top-Notch* magazine steadily from July, 1921, to November, 1927, turning out on the average one story or one part of the serial each week.⁵² Cook had a standing order each year for a football and a Christmas story from Street and Smith. He was often amused to find several of his stories in one magazine issue, some under assumed names, while one might be under his own name.

Cook wrote new stories for Street and Smith's *Adventure Library* from 1925 to 1927.⁵³ Thirty-eight were issued semi-monthly for fifteen cents under Cook's own name and were as follows:

The Desert Argonaut
A Quarter to Four
Thorndyke of the Bonita
A Round Trip to the Year 2000
The Gold Gleaners
The Spur of Necessity
The Mysterious Mission
The Goal of a Million
Marooned in 1492
Running the Signal
His Friend the Enemy
In the Web
A Deep Sea Game
The Paymaster's Special
Adrift in the Unknown
Jim Dexter, Cattleman

In the Wake of the Scimitar
His Audacious Highness
At Daggers Dawn
The Eighth Wonder
The Cat's-Paw
The Cotton Bay
Cast Away at the Pole
The Testing of Noyes
The Fateful Seventh
Montana
The Deserter
The Sheriff of Broken Bow
Wanted: A Highwayman
Frisbie of San Antone
His Last Dollar
Fools for Luck

⁵¹Letter to the Collector of Internal Revenue, Detroit, Michigan, dated June 4, 1920.

⁵²Archives of Street and Smith.

⁵³William Wallace Cook collection.

Juggling with Liberty
Back from Bedlam
A River Tangle
A Billionaire Pro Tem

Dare of Darling & Co.
Trailing *The Josephine*

The first eighteen were reprints of the *New Fiction Series*, 1907-1909. After the thirty-eighth issue, July, 1926, William Wallace Cook shared the *Adventure Series* with many others, or if he wrote additional stories for the series, they were issued under a Street and Smith company name. Only three stories in the *Adventure Series* were in Cook's own name after July, 1926. They were "Golden Bighorn," "The Innocent Outlaw" and "Rogers of Butte." Cook's stories for the *New Fiction Series* and *Adventure Library* were reprinted in the *Select Library*, 1928, under his own name.

Chelsea House, a subsidiary publishing house of Street and Smith, brought out William Wallace Cook's fourth hardback book, *Around the World in Eighty Hours*, in 1925. In that year Cook sold book rights for "The Skylark," "Harlequin, Ha" and "As the Sparks Fly Upward."⁵⁴

Cook enjoyed seeing his stories transformed into film. Tom Mix appeared in "After Your Own Heart" and Douglas McLain in "Sunshine Trail." When a Cook story, "Speed Spook," was shown at the Garden Theater in Marshall, publicity was given the film by converting a regular passenger sedan so that the driver was for all appearance, invisible. Mr. Cook was both surprised and delighted to see a character and car he had created in fiction call at his home on North Kalamazoo Avenue.

He was married for the second time in 1927 to Mary A. Ackley. For some years they spent winters in California but returned to the Kalamazoo Avenue residence for the spring, summer and fall months.⁵⁵ In December of 1927 Charles Agnew MacLean, managing editor of Street and Smith's *Top-Notch Magazine*, wrote Cook to inquire about the possibility of writing additional Merriwell stories for *Top-Notch* on a more extended basis. MacLean pointed out that Patten was no longer writing for Street and Smith and that the company held the right to continue the stories under the Street and Smith owned name of Burt L. Standish. When Cook responded favorably, a file of earlier Merriwell stories were sent to Cook so that he could immerse himself with the proper background and take up Frank Merriwell, and his younger brother, Dick, where Cook had "left him off" earlier. The rates were now three and one-third cents a word so that a 30,000 word-story would bring \$900.⁵⁶ When he began the series in January, 1928,

⁵⁴Archives of Street and Smith.

⁵⁵Marshall *Evening Chronicle*, July 20.

⁵⁶Letters from Charles A. MacLean, editor for *Top-Notch Magazine*, dated December 6, 1927, and December 29, 1927.

his health was far from good and a new book, *Plotto*, absorbed his time, but he managed to write five stories by June, 1928, when ill health prevented him from continuing.

William Wallace Cook's last book, *Plotto, A New Method of Plot Suggestion For Writers of Creative Fiction* was published in 1928.⁵⁷ It was intended to be accompanied by class instruction. The author supplied standard skeleton plots and sub-plots that might be an inspiration for authors and by which they could embellish with their own imagination. Cook's ideas for this book had grown slowly through his years of writing. He had achieved much by his methodical, businesslike approach and diligent commitment to the task of composing. *Plotto* was the product of Cook's belief that writers did not need a great deal of inspiration; that stories resulted from hard work. A review of his life indicates he was a tireless worker.

Letters of inquiry from novice authors about the book brought great satisfaction for Cook, as did a testimonial from S. S. McClure, who stated *Plotto* provided everything but the soul of the story. This the author had to supply.⁵⁸ The limited edition book and the follow-up lessons cost \$25. Cook hoped that this venture would provide enough income, along with the new Street and Smith contract for Merriwell stories for *Top-Notch* magazine, that he might enjoy a less demanding production schedule. The *Plotto* venture did not prove successful. His health problems returned and for the last years of his life a heart condition limited his output. After his death his widow sold the rights of *Plotto* to *Writer's Digest* for a specified number of years. A new cover was put on the book and it was again offered to the public, but with little success. Cook's heirs acquired the book, including the copper plates.

The last fiction tale of Cook was published in serial form in the *Marshall Evening Chronicle* from March 25, 1933, to May 4, 1933, just three months prior to his death. "Comrades of the Glory Road" was a novel of Marshall in which he vividly described the actual places in and around the city. The time of the story was just prior to World War I, on Decoration Day.⁵⁹ Although he stated the characters were imaginary, it seems likely they were a composite of family, friends and acquaintances that he had known through his years in Marshall.

An example of his description of places in the city is the passage

⁵⁷Cook, William Wallace, *Plotto, A New Method of Plot Suggestion for Writers of Creative Fiction*, (Battle Creek: Ellis Publishing Company, 1928).

⁵⁸Letters from T. T. Flynn, undated [ca. August, 1928], and Erle Stanley Gardner, dated August 12, 1929.

⁵⁹*Marshall Evening Chronicle*, March 25, 1933 to April 22, 1933.

that describes Exchange Square as the Decoration Day Parade pauses on its way to Oakridge cemetery. "At the corner of the lot by the GAR Hall is a cannon, nicely muzzled and painted a dull black. Close to the cannon is a pyramidal heap of solid shot, also veneered in dull black." Marshall residents would recognize these same objects today. Continuing on, the parade follows "the angling street that leads through Marshall to the home of the dead, crosses Rice Creek by the mill, surmounts a rise of ground, swings over the river by the power house and then climbs to an eminence covered with trees. And there among the white stones, bivouac the 'comrades' who have gone before."

The adventure and misadventure of two Civil War veterans provided the theme of the tale. The vivid realistic description of Marshall homes and social life lent authenticity that made the fictional tale appear true. The nostalgic sentimental tale of the two Marshall comrades seemed a fitting termination to W. W. Cook's career, although it was written for a scenario contest of the *Chicago Daily News* for which Cook was awarded a \$500 prize.

William Wallace Cook died July 20, 1933, after a six-year illness. His editor and writer friends Frank Munsey, William Almon Wolff and Ormond and George Smith had preceded him in death.

With the death of the Smith brothers in April, 1933, the Street and Smith firm abandoned pulp fiction and turned to women's fashion magazines, such as *Mademoiselle* and *Charm*, and science fiction.⁶⁰

The popularity of Cook's adventure stories carried on after his death. At least five of his stories were published in book form as late as 1940 by Wright and Brown, an English publisher.

⁶⁰Reynolds, pp. 213, 215.